



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT

MOROCCO

6TH MARCH – 17TH MARCH 2018

www.oriolebirding.com

oriolebirding@gmail.com



TOUR LEADER

David Gosney

PARTICIPANTS

Baden Barker

Phil and Sandy Dunk

David and Chris Evans,

Paul Johnstone (who provided the photos)

Ken Pinney

Sue Sykes

TUESDAY 6th MARCH 2018 – *Low cloud, cool and often raining.*

We arrived in Agadir to be greeted by cold, wet weather. Not what we expected. After a meal in very popular street cafe we made our way to the Souss Estuary. The wet conditions were not only unpleasant they also made access very difficult. Everywhere was muddy and slippery with puddles to be negotiated. This meant we were unable to reach the areas we'd intended to check and instead we concentrated on the birds close to the main car park. To be fair this was pretty interesting since the muddy shores and islands opposite the car park had a terrific selection of gulls, waders, ducks, herons and a few terns to scan through. These included dozens of **Mediterranean Gulls** in various plumages and a few species we didn't find on the rest of the trip such as **Northern Pintail**, **Red Knot**, **Pied Avocet**, **Grey Plover**, **Ruff**, **Sanderling** and **Spotted Redshank**. Pride of place went to three gulls; not only was there a funny-looking **Common Gull** and a **Slender-billed Gull** hiding in the gull flocks, there was also a **Little Gull** which kept fluttering around close to us - a scarce bird in Morocco. Other good birds included an **Osprey**, **Greater Flamingos**, **Eurasian Spoonbills** and our first views of some of the Moroccan specialities: **Moroccan Magpie**, **Moroccan White Wagtail** (at least 4), **African or Ultramarine Blue Tit**, **African Chaffinch** and **Laughing Dove**. Perhaps the most rewarding sightings were some scopable views of **Barbary Partridge** - often a difficult species for everyone to see well. In the end we'd managed to see most of what we usually saw, just missing out on **Stone Curlew** and the chance of other water birds such as **Marbled Duck**. That was a shame because we met a tour leader who said the lakes in the desert were either dry or had no **Marbled Duck**. In the foul weather we didn't even try to stay to listen for **Red-necked Nightjar** and retreated instead to our hotel in Agadir.

WEDNESDAY 7th MARCH 2018 – *Low cloud, cool but mostly dry.*

The next day was still gloomy and occasionally wet but at least we were able to watch birds without getting too wet - just muddy. Around Cap Rhir lighthouse we had a few new species such as **Black Wheatear**, **Spanish Sparrow** and that perennial show-stopper **Moussier's Redstart**. We also got closer to the local **Thekla Larks**.



Thekla Lark, Cap Rhir. The bill is unimpressive and Crested Larks rarely perch up like this.

Even better, a falcon flashed past us carrying prey. It perched within scopable distance and proved to be a juvenile **Peregrine**. A **Barbary Falcon** would have been better but this was definitely a **Peregrine**. On this occasion we had no **Bald Ibis** either on the ground or in flight and we also failed to find any as we drove to the Tamri Estuary. It was too wet to reach the usual car park at the estuary so we walked a little further than usual to reach the beach. As ever this gave us fantastic views of **Audouin's Gulls** but once again there were no **Northern Bald Ibis** in view. We therefore drove further to check the road to the north of Tamri village but we got to the end of suitable habitat without spotting any. Oh dear. We turned around to head back to the village and spotted an ibis in flight. Soon it was joined by several more which flew around us before landing on a distant slope. We walked to a higher point to get a better view and, in doing so; we flushed a pair of **Stone Curlew** which landed nearby giving quite fantastic views.



Stone Curlew, north of Tamri. Always exciting to get so close to one.

We didn't see more of the ibis but added a **Tawny Pipit** by the road. After lunch we set off north to Essaouira to look for **Brown-throated Sand Martin** since this has recently been elusive at the estuaries further south. At first the birds we saw were only distant, and there were none at all at another spot, but eventually we got close enough to get reasonable views and compare them with a few **Sand Martins** that were also present. The long drive back to Agadir was enlivened only by some roadside 'Desert' **Grey Shrikes** of the race *algeriensis*.

THURSDAY 8th MARCH 2018 – *Low cloud, cool with rain showers.*

Our visit to the Oued Massa had us dodging rain showers again and the birds were atypically unforthcoming. We even struggled to find the star bird - **Black-crowned Tchagra**. The leader set off back to the van to get a speaker to try to lure one into view but, in doing so, he flushed one which eventually gave superb views right next to the road. Our next stop was at the 'secret pool' which has always been a terrific place to see good numbers of **Glossy Ibis**. But not this year. There wasn't a single ibis to be found and even the ducks were in short supply. Thankfully we spotted a big flock of maybe eighty **Glossy Ibis** which swirled around briefly in the distance. Otherwise we just enjoyed the local birds such as **Sardinian Warbler**, **Moussier's Redstart** and another two very obliging **Black-crowned Tchagra** which many people managed to photograph.



Sardinian Warbler. Oued Massa. Another photogenic male.

After a brief rest at our next hotel beyond Taroudant we were out again aiming to catch up on two birds that we'd missed so far: **Black-winged Kite** and **Red-necked Nightjar**. We tried to visit the area where previous groups had seen the kites for the last three years but once again we were thwarted by the rains; our driver balked at taking the van down the muddy track and even on foot we soon found that some of the puddles were too big to get around. We were nearly in the right area so we did at least enjoy birds such as **Desert Grey Shrike** [at very close range], **Woodchat Shrike** and birds such as **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, **Alpine Swift** and **Red-rumped Swallow** overhead. A short walk at dusk failed to produce a nightjar but we did at least hear **Maghreb Wood Owl**.

FRIDAY 9th MARCH 2018 – *Thick mist in the morning, clearing to become bright and pleasantly warm.*

Some of us went for a pre-breakfast walk to look for **Fulvous Babblers** behind our hotel but again the weather made it very difficult because a thick mist meant that we couldn't see beyond the nearest bushes. Even so we thought there might be a chance of hearing the babblers but, if they were there, they were silent. Driving on towards Ouarzazate we encountered our first passage flocks of soaring birds: **White Storks**, **Black Kites** and a few **Short-toed Eagles**. We also had our first true desert birds - some close roadside **Cream-coloured Coursers**, **Desert Wheatears** and **Long-legged Buzzards**. The mist had cleared by the time we stopped for our next target bird: **Maghreb Wheatear**. We stopped at the leader's favourite spot and had barely got out of the van before we spotted one right in front of us - a female.



Maghreb Wheatear, west of Ouarzazate. The female is like a duller version of the male.

But before most of the photographers could gather their gear she flew off and, as is their wont, disappeared to a cliff face a considerable distance away. Thankfully we soon found a male but he led us a bit of a merry dance too before some of the group, at least, got some decent photos. This really is a difficult species to pin down. Even when you find them they can still disappear irretrievably. There were surprisingly few other birds in that patch of desert; just a few **Greater Short-toed Larks** so we moved on to try the barrage at Ouarzazate. This time the weather was too dry; the reservoir had shrunk even further than in previous years and was now so far away there was no chance of us reaching it in the time we had available. Instead we explored the nearest scrub where we had a few more **Greater Short-toed Larks** and struggled to get views of the **Maghreb Crested Larks**. **White-crowned Black Wheatears** were more obliging, a taste of things to come in the desert areas. It was dark by the time we got to Boumalne.

SATURDAY 10th MARCH 2018 – *Calm and pleasantly mild at dusk but cool and very windy for the rest of the day.*

In the early morning as we left our hotel, a large falcon sped across in front of the van, presumably a **Lanner** but too fleeting to be certain. Some minutes later we were out in the famous area known as the Tagdilt Track, hoping for sandgrouse but also getting our first proper views of the special larks and wheatears. First we had to get everyone familiar with **Desert and Red-rumped Wheatears** and how to pick out the few **Temminck's Horned Larks** from the more numerous **Greater Short-toed**.



Red-rumped Wheatear, female, Tagdilt track. Fat birds with big, ginger-covered heads



Desert Wheatear, female, Tagdilt track. Note how limited the white is on the tail

Another party of larks landed some metres away but their calls identified them as **Lesser Short-toed Larks** so we wandered across to get views of their streaked underparts. Here we got our first views of **Trumpeter Finch** too. No sandgrouse came to the drinking pool but some coursers flew over.

We tried another site, hoping to find feeding sandgrouse but had to be content with flight views of a pair of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**. Sadly, by now, what had promised to be a lovely morning was being spoiled by a gathering wind which reached hang-on-to-your-tripods strength, making it hard to hear calls or hold binoculars steady. We persevered and got some reward when a pair of **Thick-billed Larks** alighted right next to us to give close but brief views.

For longer views we knew we would have to suffer the delights of Boumalne town dump. It sure lived up to its reputation as one of the most disgusting places to watch birds. It wasn't easy in that wind but we did eventually find a female **Thick-billed Lark** which several people managed to photograph amidst the plastic, broken glass and discarded shoes. We also added our first **Bar-tailed Desert Lark** - a bird that's become increasingly difficult to find here.

Our lunch was enlivened by great views of **Black Wheatear** and **Black Redstart** before we set off to the site in the hills where we'd found **Tristram's Warbler** the year before. In the windy conditions we did get brief views of the warbler but were totally distracted by a **Bonelli's Eagle** which flew around the cliffs above us looking splendid in the bright sunlight. When we returned our attention to the warbler it took us a while before we were getting views of a bird hopping around the bushes. Hang on, that's not a Tristram's. To our amazement we'd found a **Streaked Scrub Warbler** and before long we realised there were two of them. When we later mentioned this to another experienced Morocco tour leader he was incredulous, told us it was in the wrong habitat and wanted to know if we had photos to prove it [we had]. Although this was probably the find of the trip it was soon to be eclipsed when the **Bonelli's Eagle** reappeared, this time giving the most amazing close views, better than any the leader had ever had before, anywhere. It even perched in a tree on the cliff face and let us admire it through the scopes.



Bonelli's Eagle, Dades Mountains. Just awesome.

Returning back to Boumalne there was just about time to visit a site for **Pharaoh Eagle Owl**. This is a site where several birders insist they've had views in the past but the leader admitted to making

several visits here and only ever seeing the bird once when it was flushed by over-enthusiastic kids. On arriving at the site we all made a panicked exit from the van because three birds of prey were in the air together. By the time we got views of them we managed to see that one was a **Long-legged Buzzard**, one was a large falcon, presumably **Lanner** and the other one gave us the slip. As some of us grilled all the nooks and crannies on the distant cliff face, trying to turn rocks into owls in the fading light, David shouted "That's an owl on that near ridge". Sure enough we could just make out the silhouetted head and ear tufts of a **Pharaoh Eagle Owl**, much closer than we'd all been looking. Even better, it took off and actually flew towards us, flapped right past us and perched on the slope behind us. It then realised we were there and skipped off over the brow of the hill. Wow. All this when there was still enough light to see the detail of its wing pattern and body markings. Amazing. **Scrub Warbler**, **Bonelli's Eagle** and **Pharaoh Eagle Owl**. Hard to pick a bird of the day.

SUNDAY 11th MARCH 2018 – *Calm at last but becoming stickily hot by the middle of the day.*

Before setting off towards the deserts of Merzouga we tried again for sandgrouse on the plains. By now the wind at last had calmed down and so we spent a very enjoyable time studying and listening to the wonderful larks and wheatears of the area. Without the wind it was also easier to pick out a sandgrouse call - a **Pin-tailed**. Two birds appeared but they weren't the same, one was a **Pin-tailed**, the other was a **Black-bellied** but they were past us in a blink. Further scanning produced larger groups of both those species but they never came as close again.

En route to Merzouga we made our usual stop to look for **Scrub Warblers**. Yes, we'd seen them the day before but one of the group had baulked at the path up the wadi so it would still be a new species for her. Within minutes of getting out of the van we were enjoying some more larks; both **Thick-billed** and **Bar-tailed Desert Lark** were seen well and we had better views of some **Lesser Short-toed Larks** mixed in with the many **Greater Short-toed**. As we patrolled the scrub, a warbler popped up - a male **Spectacled Warbler** but, even though at times we had it surrounded, it managed to give some of us the slip. This time we failed to find a **Scrub Warbler** next to the road and had to wander across the desert before a pair entertained us with their acrobatic ways.

We reached the true desert area, the Tafilalt, with time for a bit more birding before dark. With a new road now fully open we approached Merzouga from a new direction so had to pick a new site to look for desert species. Even so, after a quiet start, as the sun was setting we managed to come across both of the target birds: an **African Desert Warbler**, shinningly pale, and a couple of **Greater Hoopoe Larks** including one doing its wonderful flip-flop display flight. Great stuff but only a glimpse of what the desert might offer the next day.

MONDAY 12th MARCH 2018 – *Calm, becoming hot by the middle of the day.*

A 5.30 start meant we were driving into the desert in the dark in three 4-wheel drive vehicles using local desert specialists as our drivers. We joined up with another birding group and trekked off together into a pile of sand dunes. They perched us on the tip of a dune while two of them wandered on ahead. They called that they could see the nest of a **Houbara Bustard** but the female had slipped away. The leader of the other group spotted her briefly between dunes but there were no open areas that we could view that might give all of us a chance of seeing her. Despite being within fifty metres of a **Houbara** it was really futile to stay and we persuaded the guides to take us away from the site and let the female go back to the nest. It was frustrating to have been so close to such an iconic bird without being able to see it but, as we drove away across a nearby plain one of the drivers spotted another. He'd found the male and all six vehicles were able to pull up not too far away and watch the bird. Not only did it give us fabulous and remarkably close views, it also indulged in a bout of its mad display, sprinting to and fro across the desert with its white feathers fluffed up in front of its face. In most years we don't see **Houbara** at all so it was exceptional to be this close to a displaying male.



Houbara Bustard, Merzouga. We were exceptionally lucky to get views like this.

The nest had only been found the day before so this detour to look for the bustard was an addition to the itinerary. It meant we were late for our next rendezvous. So our convoy of, now, six 4x4s sprinted across the desert and eventually arrived to find three more vehicles already in position at a sandgrouse drinking spot. When birds started to arrive, both **Crowned and Spotted Sandgrouse** came quite close. It was pandemonium as nine cars tried to get into pole position for the best views and it was impossible to communicate between vehicles as to which birds were which. So, even though all of us got great views of about twenty **Crowned Sandgrouse**, some hadn't realised that there were **Spotted Sandgrouse** too. Exciting but frustrating.

Still in a convoy of six cars, we moved on to our next stop where we soon located the target bird. A male **Desert Sparrow** was singing from a palm strand next to a well. We had terrific views of him and two other males and managed to see a female briefly too but even here they were greatly outnumbered by **House Sparrows**.

As we sped across the desert to our next stop we had to screech to a halt because some birds were right in front of us. **Spotted Sandgrouse**. Great views at last for those who missed them earlier.

Next we called on Mubarak, a nomad with a special talent for finding **Egyptian Nightjars**. Sure enough he was able to lead us directly to a bird crouching next to a bush. Even so, some of the group found it difficult to actually see the bird because it was so well camouflaged. Even when it practically filled the viewfinder of the scope some people still couldn't identify it as a bird. It's such an exciting moment when after many minutes of looking someone says 'Oh, THAT!!! I thought it was a rock'. Once you know what you're looking at you can see eyelids and a beak and nasal bristles.



Egyptian Nightjar, Merzouga. Is it a rock? A pile of dung? No, it's a nightjar.

The next site was meant to be one for **Fulvous Babbler** but when we got there another group had already set off along the line of bushes at a pace that was too quick for us. We didn't fancy being part of a group of about thirty people chasing birds through bushes. We retreated to a lunch stop in the shade where we were able to enjoy birds such as **Desert Warbler** and **Woodchat Shrike** at more leisure.

By now we'd seen almost all the special birds of the desert so we spent the afternoon cruising around with just our three vehicles, spotting and getting close to as many birds as possible: **Cream-coloured Coursers**, **Brown-necked Ravens**, **Greater Hoopoe Larks**, **Bar-tailed Desert Larks**, **Greater Short-toed Larks** and several parties of **Thick-billed Larks**. Most of the group still wanted decent views of **Spectacled Warbler** so we concentrated on runs of short vegetation where they might be found. This enabled us to see plenty of **African Desert Warblers** and a surprise **Bluethroat** but when we finally found another **Spectacled** it once again showed only briefly and managed to disappear. In compensation, as we explored another wadi, we were trying to get views of another **African Desert Warbler** when a warbler landed almost next to it. **Tristrams Warbler**! It perched long enough for all of us to see its id features and several people managed to get photos too. We set off to visit a site for **Pharaoh Eagle Owl** but found that nomads were working [collecting fossils] in the area where it sometimes sits. We explained that we'd already had great views and therefore didn't search more thoroughly. There was still time for just one more burst of excitement when the leader shouted '**Isabelline Wheatear**' and we all got views of another bird that's often missed. By the time we got back to our hotel after a very long day we'd seen just about all the desert birds and got back with memory cards full of bird photos.

TUESDAY 13th MARCH 2018 – *Calm, becoming hot by the middle of the day.*

We had a whole day to spend in the desert trying to catch up on anything that anyone hadn't seen well enough. One of the target birds was to be **Fulvous Babbler** since we'd missed it at several sites. It's a bird that is easily missed so it was a big relief when one was spotted from our moving vehicle, diving into a roadside palm. It turned out there were at least four in that group and we had superb photographable views.



Fulvous Babbler, Rissani. One of a troop right next to the road.

We hadn't yet had convincing views of **Lanner Falcon** so the next stop was a nest site for that species. Sometimes, even at the nest, there is no activity and we fail to see them, but this time we saw at least two change-overs at the nest so both adults were seen well both at rest and in flight. What superb birds. Here we also had our first proper views of **Desert Lark**, more **Trumpeter Finch** and another, much closer, **Tristram's Warbler** not to mention a grey-looking fox with a white tail tip - a **Desert Fox** but not a **Fennec**.

We still hadn't seen **Barbary Falcon** so we tried a traditional site for that species too. We'd been told the site was unoccupied this year but as soon as we got out of the van we could see a falcon silhouetted on the skyline of the cliff. Piece of cake this bird finding lark. Except careful scrutiny proved that the falcon was a **Common Kestrel**!

After appreciating the joys of the local speciality, **Pizza Berbere**, we went to the leader's favourite spot for babblers, not because we needed them but because it was also a site for **Long-billed Crested Lark** or **Maghreb Lark**. While scanning for the larks, which we saw well, we couldn't help but keep seeing more babblers hopping and flitting around in the background. We needn't have worried.

The last bird on the requested list was **Spectacled Warbler**. We'd seen it twice but not well enough for most people. So we checked more areas of desert scrub and only found more **Desert Warblers** and **Greater Hoopoe Larks** and loads of **Greater Short-toed Larks**. We stopped for a beer and checked the hotel gardens for migrants. We managed a **Common Redstart** and several **Chiffchaffs** some of which looked like dead-ringers for **Iberian Chiffchaff** [bold head pattern, yellow supercillium, especially in front of the eye, yellow ventral area, and whitish belly with yellow streaks] but none of them called. So we are still left wondering. As the light dipped we explored around the hotel but there was little about, just a **Subalpine Warbler** and one more warbler - a **Spectacled**! This time it sat still long enough for most people to see at least its white throat blue head and black face.

WEDNESDAY 14th MARCH 2018 – *Calm and pleasantly warm..*

The next day is always billed as just a driving day but we always make stops when we see stuff. On this occasion we had more **Brown-necked Ravens**, some migrating **Black Kites**, this time with a

Booted Eagle with them and, at our coffee stop, we had more **Spanish Sparrows** and our best views yet of **Subalpine Warbler**. We had time to make another attempt to get to the water of the Barrage near Ouarzazate. The driver stopped far short of the shore, not wanting to risk getting stuck but at least we could see the lake! We marched out across the parched plain until we were close enough to identify some of the water birds; a modest selection of waders, flocks of **White Stork**, **Greater Flamingo**, **Ruddy Shelduck** and **Common Shelduck**, two species of grebe and a few ducks including **Gadwall** and.....**Marbled Duck**, the species we'd been told wasn't here. A look at the many larks here revealed lots of **Greater Short-toed** again and a few **Maghreb Crested Larks**.

THURSDAY 15th MARCH 2018 – *Calm and pleasantly mild even at the highest altitudes but becoming cloudy and rainy by mid-afternoon. Distinctly cool by late afternoon and evening.*

On this day we drive through the Atlas Mountains to our hotel on the north side of the hills. Our main target species for the day are normally **Levaillant's Woodpecker** and **Tristram's Warbler** but we'd already had fabulous views of the warbler. So, just the woodpecker then. We stopped at one of the leader's favourite sites where they'd been seen fantastically well three years in a row but not last year! Not this year either. Oh dear.

We spent a bit of time around the higher parts of the Tizi-n-Tichka pass and managed to add species such as **Red-billed** and **Alpine Choughs** and **Rock Sparrow** but only glimpsed **Rock Buntings**.

The next stop for **Levaillant's Woodpecker** was at the most famous site where they sometimes nest in some roadside trees. But, as we'd been warned by another leader, the trees had been felled in preparation for widening the road. Indeed lots of trees had gone, on both sides of the road giving the place a much more open feel. This actually made it easier to see the local **Common Crossbills** but that was no compensation for us missing out on the woodpecker. They might still be there but we certainly didn't find them. We did add some more species to the trip list such as **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Coal Tit**, **Firecrest** [heard only] and **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and had several views of a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**.

As we reached the north side of the mountains, the weather closed in and cloaked us in drenching drizzle. We didn't bother to stop for the **Tristram's Warblers** but went straight to the hotel and offered a wet walk out from there. We've had **Levaillant's Woodpecker** there in the past but we didn't hold out much hope and in the end the best birds were **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Girl Bunting** and **Hawfinch**. Would the weather pick up by tomorrow?

FRIDAY 16th MARCH 2018 – *Low cloud turned to snow in the mountains. Cold and very misty at the ski resort with snow covering most of the ground.*

It didn't seem too bad when we set off from Asni on the mountain road to Oukaïmeden. A bit of mist and drizzle that's all. But, as we climbed to half way up the pass, the drizzle turned to sleet then snow. Then the snow started settling. The temperature gauge said -1. The road ahead was covered in snow and more was falling. It would be worse higher up. We had no choice but to turn back. We could still try the long way round but that might be closed too. And if it was open, would we even be able to watch birds at the top? It seemed unlikely that we'd see anything today. By abandoning this mountain road we would also miss out on two sites which offered our best remaining hope for **Levaillant's Woodpecker**.

So we approached Oukaïmeden the long way round. We heard that the Tizi-n-Tichka pass was closed due to snow but the barrier at the bottom of the Oukaïmeden road was open. We managed to get high enough to get great views of some roadside **Rock Buntings** and **Firecrest** at least. In fact the road was open all the way to the ski resort where it was cold with lots of snow and very poor visibility but hey, we had a chance. After a necessary coffee stop we drove up and down and found loads of **choughs** of both species but the only small birds were **African Chaffinch**. No **Crimson-winged** or **Atlas Horned Larks** in the car parks. Our first good bird was a surprise. **Alpine Accentor** is a bird we often miss out on but there were three feeding around the 'houses' across the valley.

Great. By exploring further we at least found some **Atlas Horned Larks** and as we approached them we had another surprise - a male **Seebohm's Wheatear**.



Seebohm's Wheatear, Oukaimeden. You can see why some authorities call it Black-throated Wheatear.

They're not supposed to arrive until later when the snow has gone so we never really expected to get one. We met other birders and sent them looking for the wheatear and larks while we kept checking the car parks. By now there were lots of **Atlas Horned Larks** [40+] in the car park so we got out to photograph them, despite the awful light.



Atlas Horned Lark, Oukaïmeden. Genetically more different from our Horned Lark than the much more distinctive Temminck's Horned Lark is.

The leader spotted a silhouette in the mist - **Crimson-winged Finch**. We walked towards it and found several of them but even at a few metres distance they looked like grey blobs in the mist. Thankfully some of them came down to the ground where we saw them at a few feet range. It was still poor light but at least here you could see the pink wings and distinctive head pattern.



African Crimson-winged Finch, Oukaïmeden. Endemic to the Atlas Mountains

The weather was no better when we emerged from our lunch stop so we decided to head back down the mountain. As we descended we had another stunning surprise, an adult **Bonelli's Eagle** flew low over us and glided across the valley below us showing the white patch on its back. The leader had one last site for **Levaillant's Woodpecker**, having failed at the first two and being unable to reach two others. The light was poor but at least the rain had stopped. We trudged around, seeing nothing but **Cirl Bunting**, **African Blue Tit** and **African Chaffinch**. We stopped where a pair of woodpeckers had been seen the year before. The male had been calling aggressively then but, even when we played a recording, there was no sign this year. Until Chris saw a 'Green Woodpecker' fly across a field. Then it was seen again, flying away into some distant trees. We scanned with the scope. Bingo! A male **Levaillant's Woodpecker** was perched as if glued to a trunk. We all had a look at it then walked up the slope towards it. In the end we got quite close - certainly close enough for great scope views and for the photographers to get a record shot. Phew. And on that note we decided to call it a day and wind down the hill to Marrakech.

SATURDAY 17th MARCH 2018 – *Low cloud turned to snow in the mountains. Cold and very misty at the ski resort with snow covering most of the ground.*

Before setting off to the airport we had time to study our first definite **Pallid Swifts** of the trip but failed to find a **Little Swift** amongst them. **Moroccan Magpies** adorned the route and **House Buntings** sang in the terminal building but that was it.

We'd had to work hard for some species which didn't appear according to plan but in the end we saw almost all the target birds. We didn't get to the best sites for Red-necked Nightjar, Black-shouldered Kite or Barbary Falcon but they were really the only key species we missed - and we got birds such as Houbara and Alpine Accentor which we'd often missed previously. And despite the rain and the mist we got loads of close views of many of the birds so the photographers all went home happy with lots of images to edit and label.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1 Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
2 Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
3 Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
4 Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
5 Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
6 (Northern) Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
7 (Northern) Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
8 Marbled Duck	<i>Marmaronetta angustirostris</i>
9 Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
10 Barbary Partridge	<i>Alectoris barbara</i>
11 Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
12 Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
13 Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>
14 Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
15 Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
16 Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
17 Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
18 White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
19 Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
20 Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>

21	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
22	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
23	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
24	Short-toed (Snake) Eagle	<i>Circus gallicus</i>
25	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
26	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
27	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
28	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>
29	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>
30	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
31	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
32	Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
33	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
34	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
35	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
36	Houbara Bustard	<i>Chlamydotis undulata</i>
37	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
38	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
39	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
40	Stone-curlew (Eurasian Thick-knee)	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>
41	Cream-coloured Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
42	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
43	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
44	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
45	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
46	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
47	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
48	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
49	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
50	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
51	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
52	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
53	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
54	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
55	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
56	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
57	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
58	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
59	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
60	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
61	Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
62	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
63	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
64	Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>
65	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
66	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>

67	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
68	Crowned Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>
69	Spotted Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles senegallus</i>
70	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>
71	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>
72	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
73	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
74	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
75	Laughing (Palm) Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
76	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
77	Maghreb Wood Owl	<i>Strix (aluco) mauritannica</i>
78	Desert (Pharaoh) Eagle Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>
79	Egyptian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>
80	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>
81	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
82	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>
83	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
84	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
85	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
86	Levaillant's Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus vaillantii</i>
87	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
88	Bar-tailed Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes cinctura</i>
89	Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
90	Hoopoe Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
91	Thick-billed Lark	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>
92	Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
93	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>
94	Long-billed Crested (Maghreb) Lark	<i>Galerida macrorhyncha</i>
95	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
96	Atlas (Horned) Lark	<i>Eremophila (alpestris) atlas</i>
97	Temminck's (Horned) Lark	<i>Eremophila bilopha</i>
98	Plain (Brown-throated Sand) Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
99	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
100	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
101	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
102	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
103	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
104	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
105	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
106	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
107	Yellow (Iberian) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
108	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
109	White (Pied) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
110	Moroccan White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba subpersonata</i>
111	Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
112	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>

113	Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>
114	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
115	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
116	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
117	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
118	Moussier's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>
119	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
120	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
121	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
122	Seebohm's Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe seebohmi</i>
123	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>
124	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
125	Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe moesta</i>
126	Maghreb Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe halophila</i>
127	White-crowned Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucopyga</i>
128	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
129	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
130	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
131	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
132	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
133	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
134	Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler)	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
135	Streaked Scrub Warbler	<i>Scotocerca inquieta</i>
136	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
137	African Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserti</i>
138	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
139	Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
140	Tristram's Warbler	<i>Sylvia deserticola</i>
141	Western Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia (cantillans) inornata</i>
142	Eastern Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia (cantillans) cantillans</i>
143	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>
144	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
	Iberian Chiffchaff ?	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>
145	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
146	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>
147	Fulvous Babbler	<i>Turdoides fulva</i>
148	(African) Blue Tit	<i>Parus (caeruleus) teneriffae</i>
149	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
150	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>
151	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
	Black-crowned Tchagra (-headed Bush	
152	Shrike)	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>
153	Desert Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius elegans</i>
154	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>
155	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
156	Moroccan Magpie	<i>Pica pica mauritanica</i>

157	Yellow-billed (Alpine) Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>
158	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
159	Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
160	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
161	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
162	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
163	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
164	Desert Sparrow	<i>Passer simplex</i>
165	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
166	African Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs africana</i>
167	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
168	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
169	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
170	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
171	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
172	Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguineus</i>
173	Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>
174	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
175	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
176	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
177	House Bunting	<i>Emberiza sahari</i>
178	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>

OTHER WILDLIFE

- 1/Barbary Ground Squirrel
- 2/Terrapin sp [probably Spanish Terrapin]
- 3/Fat Sand Rat
- 4/Toad sp
- 5/bat sp
- 6/Desert Fox
- 7/Scarce Swallowtail

All images copyright Oriole Birding